

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto
Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

GUARNERI QUARTET

*Arnold Steinhardt - Violin
John Dalley - Violin*

*Michael Tree - Viola
David Soyer - Cello*

*Thursday, February 16, 1967
8:30 p.m.*

Programme

QUARTET IN B FLAT, OP. 18, No. 6 - - - - - Beethoven

Allegro con brio
Adagio, ma non troppo
Scherzo: Allegro
La Malinconia: Adagio, leading to
Allegretto quasi Allegro

If the six Quartets, Op. 18, are a farewell to an 18th-century medium and manner, the sixth is the most "18th-century" of the set. Beethoven's models, he said, were Haydn and Albrechtsberger, and Haydn clearly inspired the teasing tempo-changes of the finale here. Though Beethoven did not mention Mozart, his is another obvious influence. He did note his indebtedness to the quartets of a forgotten contemporary, Aloys Förster — works that might well prove worthy of revival nowadays (when one so often hears that the repertoire is exhausted).

Yet this piece belongs at the same time to a special type, such as not even the last Haydn quartets (which after all also belong to the 1790s) approximate. True, the opening allegro presents an exposition with an 18th-century broken-chord motive that might have been composed by almost anyone, and with the tried-and-true device of a concluding trill. But the secondary theme, in the dominant key, is of a special earnestness that compels attention despite its ordinariness. It is the string-quartet parallel to the secondary themes of the Op. 22 Piano Sonata and the second Symphony — sing-songish, grimly banal, it could be a starting-point for an investigation of Beethoven's later near-universality of appeal.

The long introduction to the last movement virtually amounts to a fifth movement in itself, and its subtitle, *La Malinconia*, is an exceptional departure for Beethoven. He even adds a memo to the players, in Italian: "This piece should be played with the greatest delicacy."

QUARTET IN E FLAT, OP. 127 - - - - - Beethoven

Maestoso — Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzando vivace
Finale

Prince Nicholas Galitzin, Russian nobleman and art-patron, proposed in a letter of November 1822 to Beethoven a commission for three string quartets. Beethoven had not written any quartets for about twelve years, but had already been turning his thoughts back to this medium. He accepted, and slowly the first of Galitzin's pieces took shape: the present work was completed early in 1825, and sent to the Prince, and the first performance took place on March 6 of that year. Two other quartets, Op. 130 and 132, followed rather more rapidly, and soon Beethoven added to them still another pair of quartets, Op. 131 and 135. The five great "last quartets" are a unique musical testament, and, even though Galitzin's part of the bargain was regrettably not fully completed until after the composer's death in 1827, it is gratifying to find that the reason for this was not any dissatisfaction or bewilderment with the scores themselves (such as was indeed shown by other players and hearers at first): he wrote to Beethoven on receipt of Op. 127: "Your genius is centuries in advance, and at the present time there is scarcely one hearer who

would be sufficiently enlightened to enjoy the full beauty of this music; but posterity will pay homage to you and bless your memory more than your contemporaries are able to do."

The Quartet is removed, in its general "language" and its textures, from earlier Beethoven music; this is especially noticeable in the work's new permeation of counterpoint, in its variational attitude (shown not only in the variations proper), and in the general avoidance of precedent in its formal lay-outs. The crux of all this is (as J. W. N. Sullivan, one of the first to explore Beethoven's creative mind using the "meaning" of the music as evidence, has put it): in this music, "Beethoven is exploring new regions of consciousness."

The first movement is unusually sonorous, compact, and singularly shaped. The opening brief "maestoso" recurs in various keys several times during the movement, rather like the tutti-theme of a string concerto by Corelli or one of his contemporaries. The "allegro" portion of the piece is music of smooth-flowing joins; close imitations occur between instruments, and melody lines assume greater importance than the rhythmic pulsation of the ideas — an obvious shift of emphasis from the earlier quartets.

Variations were a major preoccupation of Beethoven in his last works — one thinks of the finale of the Ninth Symphony, the "Diabelli" Variations for piano, the great variations of the Op. 131 Quartet. His tendency was to find ways of making the classical variation procedure more finely organic, so that within a single variation there is often the same cumulative sense, the same gradual motion from simple to complex, that one observes in the variation-set as a whole. The second movement here is a beautiful example. A mysteriously tranquil, slow, scalar theme arises, and unfolds itself in parallel phrases of first violin and cello. The ensuing variations and the long coda re-count this growth, and there is an extraordinary expansion of the feelings of intimacy, of sad resignation, that is only partly explainable in such outward features of the score as throbbing accompaniment figures and minute dynamic indications.

The scherzo recalls a more familiar Beethovenian world, but with differences: the rhythms are fragmented, imitation is again a strong factor, and cutting across the scherzo's traditional dancing character are interruptions in a duple rhythm in cello and viola, oddly grouped phrases for the full ensemble, and a trio (or middle section) in a totally new, and even wilder, speed than the scherzo itself. The finale — with the throaty, low-string coloring of its main theme, and its remarkable harmonic "opening-out" into a faster-time coda towards the end — provides a noble and wonderfully-proportioned conclusion.

- INTERMISSION -

QUARTET IN C, OP. 59, No. 3 - - - - - Beethoven

Introduzione: Andante con moto — Allegro vivace

Andante con moto quasi Allegretto

Menuetto: Grazioso, leading to

Allegro molto

C major was for Beethoven, especially in his middle period, the key of ringing affirmation. The present Quartet is the most dynamic and affirmative of the Opus 59 set.

One hopes that the contemporary pedants who criticized Beethoven for daring to begin his First Symphony with a tonic seventh resolving into the chord of the subdominant were safely laid to rest before the production of this C major Quartet, for it begins with a diminished-seventh chord, which has

no resolution at all. The basis of this mysterious, groping introduction proves to be a continuously-descending scale in the cello part, which eventually reaches a pause on the leading-note, B. The expected firm down-beat resolution onto C still does not arrive, however, until we are well into the main body of the movement. Indeed the whole piece is imbued with the incisive up-beat rhythm which initiates the Allegro. It appears in the transition passage, and again, imitatively, in the course of the second theme — and it completely dominates the development, where it becomes first telescoped into a dialogue between upper and lower pairs of instruments, and then doubled in speed for an effect of excitement and animation. In view of what follows in the rest of the Quartet, the imitative presentation of both the second theme and the staccato closing theme here is significant. The reprise of the opening theme of the Allegro shows the original first-violin flights completely transformed in character and in accompanimental setting: what was merely incisive at the beginning now appears as a dynamic outgrowth of the long central development.

The slow movement is a lament of strange quality. There is a sort of other-worldliness in the rigorous pulsation of its low-cello pizzicatos and in the momentary vision of light provided by an ethereal fragment of 'second subject'. The mournful cadence-theme has an inescapable chant-like expression that is almost primeval in its appeal. J. W. N. Sullivan indeed accounts for the movement in terms of some depth of 'racial memory' which momentarily welled up in Beethoven. For Marion Scott, this strange agelessness and inescapability is a clue to the unity of the Rasumovsky set: she sees it, fancifully perhaps, as a free musical depiction of the Russian soul, which here parallels the actual Russian themes of the other two quartets.

The third movement is retrospective — a real minuet, dance-like in accentuation, but courtly rather than brusque, with rhythms that are ornamental rather than insistent. A coda develops some of the motifs along mysterious harmonic paths, coming to a pause on the dominant.

The famous finale, which follows immediately, is one of the most overwhelmingly brilliant movements Beethoven ever wrote. Like many famous things in art, it has seldom been seen for what it is. Specifically, one stretches a point in calling it a fugue. True, its opening subject is expressed by the four instruments entering one by one — but if this is a fugal exposition, it is certainly a very crude one, by the standards Beethoven himself supplies from around this time, for example in the fugato passages of the Third Symphony. Rather the movement has its prototype in various finales by Haydn and Mozart, where fugal and homophonic passages (the old style and the new) are deliberately juxtaposed. Such pieces are historically the first solutions offered to the problem of a rapport between the texture of fugue and the drama of sonata form: the finale of Mozart's Quartet in G (Köchel 387) is one of the best-known examples. But Beethoven seems to have been the first to realize, however naively, that when four instruments enter one by one the volume of sound becomes greater. One suspects therefore that the 'fugal exposition' here is simply a new way of achieving the Beethovenian dynamic crescendo. By the last entry, in the first violin part, the counterpoint is in just two voices, doubled in octaves; but what an irresistible onward motion the passage has! The 'fugue-subject' itself, with its double-anacrusis motif, implies the strongest possible forward momentum.

The over-all plan is that of a sonata-form movement. The second subject grows from a brief four-way conversation in short snippets of subdued excitement. The development gives us the 'fugue-subject' in inversion and in close canon, and then in a series of long, highly dramatic, crescendo-phrases taken by each instrument in turn — one of the most celebrated passages in all the Beethoven quartets, and justly so. In the reprise a chromatic countertheme is combined with the 'fugue-subject'. The coda, with its emphatic optimism, great length, and boundless energy, strains the quartet medium to its very limits.